

Tuesday, June 5, 2012

*Washington, D.C. – Congressman Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico's Third District spoke on the House floor today in support of his amendment to increase funding for environmental cleanup at National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Laboratories. Below are his remarks as prepared.*

"Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. My amendment is similar to that of my friend from New Mexico. It would simply increase funding for Defense Environmental Cleanup at NNSA labs by just under \$22 million to bring it to the level of the President's request and decrease funding for the NNSA Office of the Administrator by the same amount.

"I offer this amendment because, to put it simply, it's a more effective use of taxpayer funds for NNSA to remove dangerous toxic waste from their labs' property than it is to maintain the current level of redundant oversight bureaucracy.

"Last June, the Las Conchas forest fire burned 150,000 acres of my district in New Mexico and encircled Los Alamos National Laboratory. Had this fire burned contaminated areas on lab property, a plume of toxic smoke would have threatened the health of everyone in its path. The lab has promised to clean these areas, many of which contain waste from the Manhattan Project or the Cold War weapons program, but Congress must also fulfill its obligation to appropriate funds for the cleanup.

"While the NNSA labs have pressing environmental issues that demand our attention, there has been increasing evidence that paring back the NNSA's Office of the Administrator could actually make the agency and its labs more cost-effective and productive. A recent report by the National Academies on NNSA's management of its laboratories concluded that the NNSA's oversight had become inefficient and a distraction from the labs' vital mission.

“Following a series of hearings, the House Armed Services committee added provisions to the FY2013 National Defense Authorization Act that this body passed a few weeks ago to change NNSA's oversight approach and to reduce its personnel. This amendment is consistent with these provisions. If there are going to be fewer authorized NNSA personnel, then NNSA's funding level should reflect that.

“My budget-neutral amendment reduces outlays by \$3 million next fiscal year by simply moving funds from the NNSA regulatory arm to a place where they put boots on the ground to support cleanup.

“I appreciate the work of the Chairman, Ranking Member and the entire committee on this area and their commitment to cleanup. It is my hope that I am able to emphasize the dire situation that needs attention in New Mexico and around the country.

“I urge adoption of this amendment and yield the balance of my time.”

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